CHAPTER XLIII

SHIPPING PROBLEMS

I. RELIEVING CONGESTION AT THE PORTS

THE unprecedented activities of the War led to a complete overthrow of the normal organisation and functioning of British ports. This is not surprising in view of the fact that the whole of Britain's war effort had to go through her ports and harbours. Our Navy was using many of our harbours as bases for some of its activities. Southampton was closed to merchant shipping. Prize cargoes of war contraband were being constantly brought into the ports and dumped in the warehouses along the wharves, to wait the adjudication of the Prize Court. Government purchases of supplies arrived in big consignments, and had to wait distribution. This exceptional activity on unusual lines would in any event have created a great deal of confusion and congestion. The problem was intensified by the fact that so many of the regular dock workers had joined up and, as a result, there was a shortage of labour to handle goods.

Ports closed

The steps taken to deal with this problem during the first part of the War can be briefly summarised*

As early as 22nd January, 1915, a deputation of shipowners waited on the President of the Board of